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THE PARLOR.

BY MARY GAY HUMPHREYS.

"THE Drawing Room" has a magnificent sound, but it has no such tender associations as cluster about the parlor. Most women are afraid of their drawing rooms, so to speak, but they adore the parlor. No matter how humble it is, it is as dearly cherished. In Arkansas it has for its most conspicuous article of furniture a bedstead, high with feathers, and underneath it is discreetly stored away the family coffee and sugar, but above is the glory of the gayest of quilts, and on the "shams" which cover its capacious pillows elaborate needlework is wrought. In all this is involved as much delight and thoughtful consideration as would be in the fitting-up of a Boule cabinet with Sèvres and bronze in a New York drawing room.

Every housewife appreciates the convenience of having one room always ready for company, the keeping room, as it used to be significantly called. Many people can remember its sullen chill, when unfortunately they happened to be the guests in whose honor its doors were opened. So, called by one name or another, the parlor has ridden triumphantly over the other offices in the family temple. It would be cruelty to detach the tender roots of a woman's heart from her parlor, but an effort might be made to put it in better relations with the rest of the house. Such liberties have been taken with majestic drawing rooms. In one of the proudest houses on the Avenue in New York city, the sitting room has the best north-east corner of the house, commanding two streets, while the drawing room, in all its majestic proportions, stretches toward the back of the house, and its view, only on a side street, is compensated for by lavish upholstery, carved woods and costly bric-a-brac.

Imprimis, the parlor distinguished from the sitting room, as it is when there is no drawing room—and in the ten million homes of this country containing a parlor the proportion of drawing rooms is small—has no right to the best and most cheerful location in the house. That belongs to the family room by all that goes to make up domestic health and comfort, light, air, sunshine and the entertainment of the varying panorama of the street. In most houses, whether in town or country, there is a better opportunity for a spacious, well-considered room, suitable for the hospitality which the parlor is to offer, in the rear than in the front of the house, where the dimensions are in a way limited by the hall and the width of town lots.

In one of the show houses of this city, a house unusually small in its proportions, but fitted up with the best skill of the most artistic decorators, there is a charming arrangement of the parlor and dining room. Although a high-stoop house, it is very narrow, giving but a small passage way and reception room about the ordinary size of that of an English-basement house, as it is found in this country. Behind this room the hall broadens into a comparatively spacious apartment, the stairs winding up the corner and overlooking the space below. Double doors, in whose space swings a magnificent portiere, opens into the parlor, a long room in proportion to the other rooms of this small house. This room is lighted by two large windows at the remote end, by cutting off the corners and placing the windows in the spaces and flanking the double doors, again filled with luxurious portieres, leading into the dining room. All this takes place at the rear of the house. The dining room again is lightened by cutting off the corners on the west side, placing windows in the spaces, which makes a sort of bay for the buffet. In the rear of the dining room, the panel is filled with a mirror, and the vista from the hall, reflected back by this mirror, is one of the most charming effects that can be imagined. If one were left the liberty of untrammelled choice, one would certainly not place any room in the rear of a city house. But since this must be, no better disposition of rooms can be made than this described. There is plenty of light, but the view of back fences is discreetly hidden with delicate Madras muslin plaited on to the sash, while the color, which the sun is not able to give, since the rooms are stowed away among brick walls, is given by glowing glass screens in the upper panels.

Thus there are many ways of circumventing the disagreeable conditions which hedge about home life in a city.

Outside of large cities, where it is possible to surround a house on all sides with open space, there is no limit to the possibilities of a parlor in the rear. There bays and alcoves can command the view regardless of the front windows which the sitting room has appropriated. Yet it is just in these houses that the parlor has appropriated the best corner. In cities there are dozens of rear parlors to one in the country. At the same time, the city parlor is by no means the sacred inclosure admitting no profane steps, that is found in the country. The city guest is ushered in to the parlor or drawing room as a matter of course; in the country it depends on the degree of formality of the visit, usually indicated by the wearing or not of one's best clothes.

There are several views one may take of the parlor, and it is best to consider these before undertaking to create such a room. The most popular view of a parlor is as a shrine into which is placed all that is most precious. With certain reservations this is really the most sensible view to take. Unless one has a very large establishment it is unwise to endeavor to give a distinct style—to make out of it Queen Anne, Louis Quinze, Marie Antoinette, a reminiscence of Pompeii, or a reflection of Japan. To indulge in a date, epoch, or national idiosyncrasy in surroundings implies a purse deep enough to gratify any passing caprice. Moreover, anything of this sort must be perfectly done; and to admit any piece of furniture or ornament, no matter how handsome, not in keeping, is an anachronism which somebody is always learned enough to discover, and ungenerous

enough to make with it a sly point against you. The safe plan is to make of your parlor a cosmopolite, equally at home with all nations and all ages.

This determination does not prevent having in advance a definite idea of what it shall express in general. That is to say, its form, balance and proportions, and its color scheme should be thoroughly conceived from the first. The safest plan in starting out is to get your framework right, and superior to changes of fashion and form. This is done by having the floors and framework of hard wood. This saves no end of trouble, since the floors may at any time be as well covered with a carpet hugging the baseboards as if they were pine; and hard wood as readily takes paint, if fashion should require it, and its possessor has not courage to hold out. The prevailing woods used are mahogany and cherry that has been treated. If possible, the floor should have an inlaid border; this may be in either of these two woods, with an oak, ash or other light wood centre. Walnut is too sombre for a parlor, and its use is never advised. If hard wood is not practicable, and in many cases in which old houses are remodelled this is the case, paint is the refuge. It seems superfluous to mention that white paint is, or should be, out of the question. The paint again comes

The woodwork was painted in warm grays, and the mouldings in pink, which carried out the tone of the room. There was so much light and color sent in from the bright green lawn, and the summer sea, that this particular scheme of color, which cannot be generally advised, seemed to be the one that could not be improved.

If white paint is inadmissible, how much more white walls? In one sense nothing is more elegant and distinguished than the white and gold drawing rooms of the old régime, but they do not belong to our time. *Outre temps outre mœurs*, and the white and gold, as it has been handed to us, sham and tawdriness, is something from which we have now happily escaped.

Paper is the first refuge for bare walls. Paper for one thing is the most accessible, and there has been such improvement in the designs and coloring, that the eye may be easily pardoned for finding in it the suitable thing. There is another way of treating walls, so simple and inexpensive, that it is strange it is not more generally used. This is painting in distemper and stenciling on the design. There are hand-books now that give directions for making the washes, and the merely mechanical part can be easily intrusted to an ordinarily careful painter.

The color is at first to be carefully considered. When there is such latitude of choice, it is scarcely necessary to particularize in this respect. A gay, buoyant aspect properly belongs to a room dedicated to leisure and the lighter moments of good-fellowship and hospitality. Warm pink tones, light yellow in which there is a feeling of brown and pale green and robin-egg blue may be suggested as appropriate grounds. With these the design is best applied in metallic tints, the tint of the metal being varied by bronze tones and used in different proportions, so that the inevitable regularity which results from stenciling should be broken up as much as possible by the variable tones of the decoration.

The arrangement of the wall space must be decided by the height and proportions of the room. If the room is not high, it is desirable to bring down the frieze and omit the dado, which at best would be partially concealed by the furniture, while the frieze always remains as an ornament.

In considering the frieze as a decoration, which shall not require the services of an expensive decorator, there are many simple designs which are just as effective as more elaborate ornament. For example, the frieze can be left in panels without having them indicated by lines. Of these one shall receive the ornament while the alternate is left plain. This has been done by one of the most prominent decorators in one of the most artistic houses of Boston, but one in which it was necessary to limit the expense. Overlapping disks, such as are seen in Japanese work, are admirable disposed in this way, each disk receiving a different metallic tone. Inside these disks a smaller ornament can be stenciled in the color of the ground or some slightly varying tint, or indeed in several tints which will give a jewel-like gleam to the ornament.

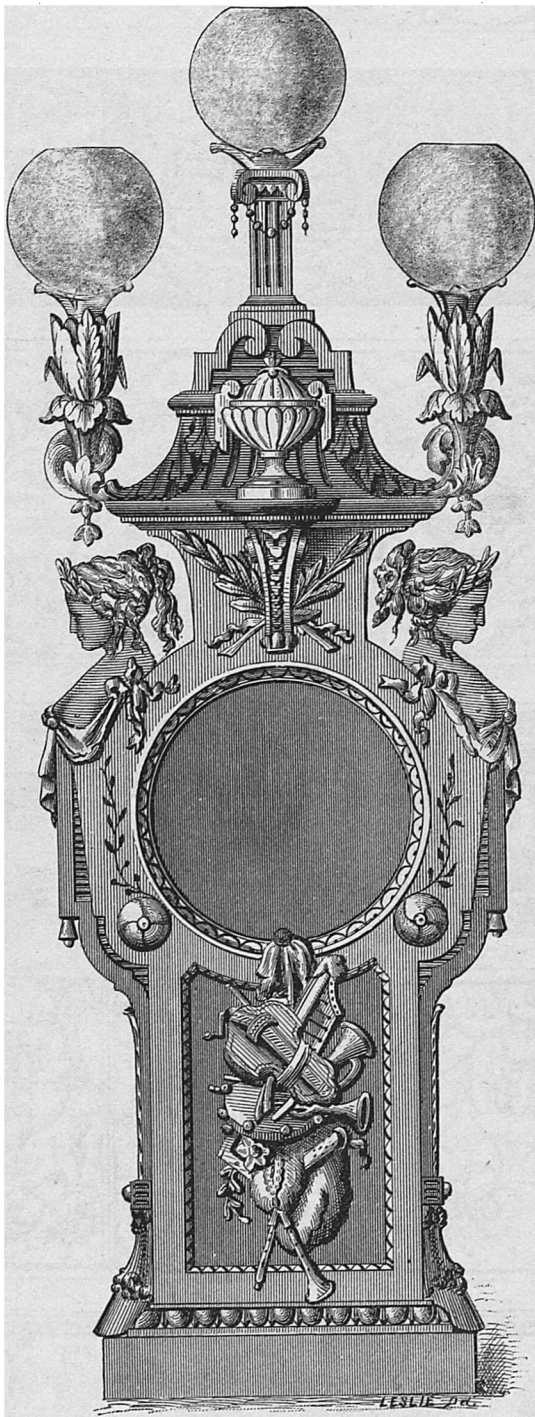
The ground design should be some simple, all-over ornament—a geometrical pattern, a conventionalized leaf or spiral rings, as may be preferred. These can be cut in large sheets at small expense, and the surface thus treated speedily. In fact, this mode of wall treatment has such wide range, and can be so easily done, that it seems only necessary to suggest it, without going further into details.

The handsomest wall hangings now used are embroidered stuffs. Several new houses in this city have satin panels embroidered in roses in the walls. A set of magnificent tapestries, after designs by Miss Dora Wheeler, have been made by Mrs. Wheeler for the drawing room of Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt. Such work as these is only for those who can afford to pay for it. These hangings, however, dispense with any other form of wall adornment, since each panel is a picture in itself. There are other embroideries, however, that are specially designed as backgrounds for other works of art. Two sets of these have been recently prepared, and are beautiful enough to be described. One of them is intended especially for water-color paintings. The material is yellow jute velours, on which is traced in couchings of gold thread an old Venetian all-over pattern. There is just enough variation in the tint of the velours and the gleam of the gold to make the ornament felt without being obtrusive. The wall surface, owing to the pile of the velours, is also subject to wide variations of tint caused by the play of light. The other hanging is a peculiar tint of red velours, light in tone, something like the tint known in millinery as crushed strawberry. The design on this is traced in gold and silver threads, couched down, now one being used, and now the other, and adding to the delightful changes of tint, which flit over the surface. The frieze is indicated in this hanging by a row of irregular tassels in different tints, couched in the same manner, while the design alone, which is merely a continuation of the pattern, has more colors introduced in the couching, and serves simply to make the difference felt.

The first cost of such hangings is somewhat great, but they are for several generations, as all good works should be, and like handsome Indian rugs, paintings and sculptures, are heirlooms to be coveted, and in turn to be handed down and used and treasured.

But a further consideration of the parlor must be reserved.

The Portiere is preferred by many to any door at all, and it is certainly very graceful. It may be elegantly embroidered so as to be really a work of art, or it may be of simple curtain material, owing its beauty to its appropriate coloring and the soft folds in which it falls. The double-faced canton flannel is the best *cheap* material for this purpose, as it hangs well and is the same on both sides. It should be sewed on and suspended from a pole, so it may be drawn aside at pleasure. Jute which is a yard and a half wide, when trimmed with bands of canton flannel of a much darker shade, has a very rich appearance and is suitable for library or dining-room.



NEWEL POST

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under the head of the color scheme to be chosen. This in a general way should be light, since the ordinary considerations, the wear, tear, dust and other such enemies avail less against the parlor than rooms more constantly used. There are various opinions as to ebonized wood, but however rich may be the effects wrought with it, unless it is decided to keep the general tone of the room low, and within a certain range of colors, black should not be used. For example, the prevailing browns, which lead into olives, are very ugly with black. In an otherwise delightful room, in one of the handsome houses of this city, the woodwork and imposing mantel is of ebonized wood; this was so far very well, but when a heavy brown velour portiere was hung between the doors, one felt immediately the unpleasant jar. Frank, uncompromising paint is always admissible, and when other things are equal, may be the best possible thing. For example, in a Newport cottage, as this elegant mansion was called, the parlor a sunny, open room looking seaward, had an air as blithe as a May morning. The floor was covered to within a couple of feet of the baseboard by a creamy moquette covered with soft roses. The furniture was upholstered in fine French cretonne, gay with flowers.